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ABSTRACT

This booklet is designed to help student participants in Close Up's Washington and Williamsburg Special Focus Program make connections between colonial Williamsburg (Virginia) and the present. Students are encouraged to see Williamsburg as a historical backdrop by which to study four fundamental ideas that have shaped the development of the United States: the desire for opportunity, the rights of individual citizens, the concept of equality, and the right to self-government. Each section of the booklet, including one on the founding of Williamsburg, as well as a section on each of the four fundamental ideas, is followed by questions to help students make connections between colonial Williamsburg and the present. (DB)

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The Vision of Williamsburg



The Washington and Williamsburg Notebook

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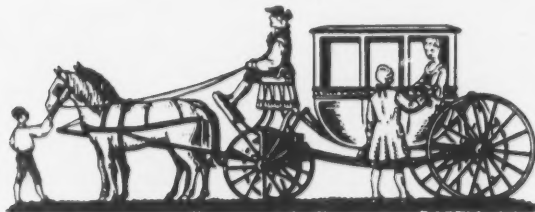
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*The Thirteen Colonies
in 1776*

The Vision of Williamsburg

The Washington and Williamsburg Notebook



Developed by

DAVID R. ZACK AND JOELLEN M. FRITSCHÉ



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Introduction

If we were able to go back to the elements of nations, and examine the oldest monuments of their history, I doubt not that we should discover in them the national character. . . .

ALEXIS DE TOCQUEVILLE,
Democracy in America, 1835

ALEXIS DE TOCQUEVILLE WAS A FRENCHMAN WHO VISITED the United States from May 1831 to February 1832. During that time, he travelled throughout the land observing life in America. His book, *Democracy in America*, was one of the first examinations of America and its new democratic way of life. At the time de Tocqueville was writing, democracy was considered "a great experiment," something so new and different that scholars had no clue as to how people would behave in such a political system. America became a living laboratory in which to study this new system and the people who were part of it. That same sense of study is alive today in CLOSE UP's Washington and Williamsburg Special Focus Program.

This week in Washington and Williamsburg is a way for you to follow in the footsteps of de Tocqueville. Although the democratic system that he studied more than 150 years ago has undergone many changes, the vision of democracy that was alive then is still alive today. What that vision is, how it developed, and where it will take us in the future is the theme of the Washington and Williamsburg Program.

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This book will help you to make connections between colonial Williamsburg and the present. Williamsburg will provide you with a historical backdrop in which to study four fundamental ideas that have shaped the development of this country: the desire for opportunity, the rights of individual citizens, the concept of equality, and the right to self-government.

These ideas, embraced by our nation's founders over two hundred years ago, were first expressed in Williamsburg as part of the Virginia Declaration of Rights. The men and women of Williamsburg shared the founders' beliefs in these ideas. Their willingness to fight for them created a nation. Today, our belief in these ideas binds our nation together as we attempt to realize the dream they began.

The Founding of Williamsburg

Abandoned to the fury of the raging sea, without any rigging to keep the ship steady, our men frequently fell overboard without anyone regarding the loss of another. . . . In many tumbles, the deck would touch the sea. . . . In this miserable posture of ship and provision, the famine grew worse. . . . Women and children made dismal cries. . . . The rats that had been our plague all the voyage we now made our prey to feed on. . . . A well grown rat was sold for sixteen shillings as a market rate. . . .

COLONEL HENRY NORWOOD,
A Voyage to Virginia, 1649

WHILE NOT ALL VOYAGES TO VIRGINIA WERE AS DIFFICULT as the one described by Colonel Norwood, anyone making such a trip in the seventeenth century faced many hardships. The ocean crossings took about six to eight weeks and were filled with danger at every turn. Navigation techniques were not accurate, and the chances of getting lost at sea were great. The ships that were used for the voyages were often old and unreliable. The vessels were small, and passengers often found themselves sharing cargo space with livestock in the "hole" (or lower deck) of the ship. Provisions were not adequate for the length of the journey, and starvation and thirst were a

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constant threat. With proper sanitary conditions virtually nonexistent, disease and sickness often spread throughout the ships. Many passengers never lived to see the New World. Why would anyone wish to endure such a voyage?

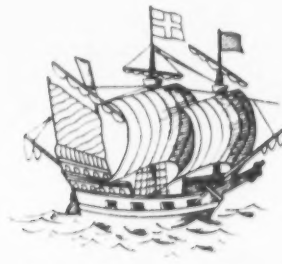
The people of Europe had many reasons for coming to the New World. For some, the voyage was a pilgrimage to a land of religious freedom. Men and women left their homes to find a place where they could practice their religion without fear of persecution or domination by one church. Protestants, Catholics, Quakers, and Jews all found a home in the New World.

For others, the voyage was an escape from war in Europe. International conflicts and internal civil wars had been raging in Europe since 1618. A young man of military age was bound to find himself serving in the army. With little choice in the matter and death imminent on the battlefield, many men literally "ran for their lives" to the New World.

For a third group of people, the voyage to the New World was a chance to start a new life. Here a man and his family could stake a claim on a parcel of land and find wealth. Soil was fertile, wild game were plentiful, fish filled the lakes and rivers, and there was an abundance of timber for homes. The opportunity that unlimited resources could bring lured many men and their families to the New World.

A fourth group saw the voyage to the New World as a trading route to be traveled over and over again. These were the merchants and sailors who worked for the companies that put up money for the settling of the colonies. Merchants saw the New World as a vast warehouse that would supply Europe's growing industries with the raw materials needed to produce manufactured goods. They in turn profited by selling "mass-produced" goods to the colonists. Many of the colonies in the New World were founded on this form of commerce, known as *mercantilism*.

Finally, a fifth group made the treacherous voyage to the New World bound in chains. These were the African slaves, brought to the colonies to work the land and act as servants for the white settlers. The slaves did not share in the unlimited opportunities the land offered its new inhabitants. Instead, their dream—to be free again—would take a hundred years or more to become reality.



The Settling of Virginia

The first English settlers who sailed to Virginia thought that the new land would yield the same riches found by the Spaniards in South America—gold and silver. Stories returning to England claimed that the Native Americans in Virginia used pots and pans made of gold and that they “go forth on holy days to gather rubies and diamonds by the seashore.” The London Company petitioned King James I for the right to colonize Virginia with the intent of gathering whatever riches they could find and establishing a colony that would produce profits for the company. On April 10, 1606, a charter was granted, and the company began making plans to send its first colonists. Many gentlemen, members of the upper class of English society, went to the New World to further their fortunes. Their life in England did not prepare them for the harsh realities of colonial life.

The London Company established the first settlement in Virginia—Jamestown—on the banks of the James River on May 16,

1607. The 105 men (no women made the first trip) who founded the colony were ill-equipped and unprepared for the hostile environment that faced them. For these gold-seeking colonists, the search for new-found wealth soon turned into a test of survival.

The first colonists struggled in the forbidding wilderness. The Native Americans were unfriendly and conducted raids on the colonists. Not enough food was planted to prevent massive starvation. Because of the settlement's location on the swampy banks of the James River, Jamestown was filled with disease-carrying mosquitoes. By November 1607—just six months after Jamestown's founding—the population of the settlement was cut in half.

Yet the London Company was determined to continue its venture. The company instituted a strict rule in the colony—"no work, no food." This form of martial law forced the men to contribute to the permanency of the colony through hard labor. They abandoned their search for gold, which proved unsuccessful from the beginning, for other pursuits such as farming and lumbering. Relations with the Native Americans, though still tense, improved. The company began an advertising campaign in England to lure new settlers and their families to the colony and even held a lottery to raise money for its expeditions. Despite these efforts, the colony still floundered without profitable results.

However, in 1614, the London Company shipped from Virginia what would prove to be the saving grace for its faraway colony—four bushels of tobacco. The demand for tobacco had risen in England since Sir Francis Drake brought it to British shores in 1586. With the introduction of tobacco growing in Virginia, the colony achieved some economic stability. The settlers could now turn their attention to developing the colony more along the lines of traditional English society.

Martial law was repealed, and traditional English law took its place. The first representative body in the New World, the House



of Burgesses, met at the small church in Jamestown on July 30, 1619. The first order of business for the new body was to consider legislation on the two matters that most directly affected the very existence of the colony—relations with the Native Americans and the price of tobacco. From these humble beginnings, the foundation for American government was laid.

By 1622, the London Company had lost its right to raise funds through a lottery and, thus, was losing a substantial amount of money on the Virginia colony. In 1623, the company willingly gave up its charter to the king of England. Virginia now became a Royal Colony, ruled directly by the king and his governors. No longer an extension of a private company, Virginia was now part of the British Empire. Profits from the colony went directly into the treasury of the king.

With the support of the British government, the Virginia colony grew steadily. However, Jamestown remained a small village and never achieved the stature befitting the capital of England's largest colony. In 1698, a fire destroyed the statehouse in Jamestown for the fourth time. Faced with rebuilding the capitol building, the royal governor, Francis Nicholson, decided it was time for the most important city in England's most important colony to move to a more desirable location. A site known as Middle Plantation on the high ground between the James River and the York River was chosen, and construction of the new city—named Williamsburg after the king of England, William III—began in 1700.

The Founding of Williamsburg

The new city of Williamsburg was designed to accommodate all the activities of colonial society. The political, educational, religious, and business lives of the colony were to be centered in Williamsburg. The royal governor lived there and called meetings of the House of Burgesses at the capitol building. The College of William and Mary provided higher education to the area's young men. Bruton Parish Church was the only church for miles around, so every Sunday the city was filled with worshippers. And Williamsburg's Market Square was the place where farmers brought their crops and livestock to sell.

With Williamsburg the center for so many different activities, the economy of the city began to reflect a wide range of demands. Small businesses catered to a variety of interests. Taverns offered food, drink, and overnight shelter. A printing office produced books, maps, newspapers, and even playing cards. And wigmakers provided colonial gentlemen with fashionable wigs that were popular during this time. By 1760, a city of 1,800 people now existed where once there was wilderness.

Most importantly, as the capital of the Virginia colony, Williamsburg became a political training ground for the young revolutionaries of the day. Both George Washington and Thomas Jefferson came to Williamsburg to further their political education. Patrick Henry spoke out many times against the British Empire in the House of Burgesses. All seven of Virginia's signers of the Declaration of Independence (Carter Braxton, Benjamin Harrison, Thomas Jefferson, Francis Lightfoot Lee, Richard Henry Lee, Thomas Nelson, and George Wythe) made their homes in or around Williamsburg and were active in the political life of the colony. These "men of the revolution" would play an important role in the decisions that would shape the nation.

Connections

1.

In the seventeenth century, people from Europe came to the New World for many different reasons. Today, people from Southeast Asia, Central America, and Mexico continue to pour into the United States. Do you think the reasons for immigrating to the United States are the same today as they were in the seventeenth century?

2.

By today's standards, the policies instituted by the London Company might be considered extreme. Yet in the seventeenth century, the British government allowed large businesses to institute freely any policy—including martial law—that would ensure a profit for the company. Today in the United States, the federal government regulates a number of businesses by establishing hiring practices, setting minimum wages, and, in some cases, controlling prices. How else has government's role in business changed over the years? Should businesses today be allowed greater freedom as they were in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries? If so, what should business be allowed to do?

3.

Many people wonder what it would be like to settle a new land. If you were among the first colonists going to a newly discovered Pacific island and you were limited to 100 pounds of luggage, what would you take with you? Would it be possible to transplant American society and government to a new environment? Would it be desirable to do so?

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What then is the American, this new man? . . . He is an American, who leaving behind him all his ancient prejudices and manners, receives new ones from the new mode of life he has embraced, the new government he obeys, and the new rank he holds. . . . The American is a new man, who acts upon new principles; he must therefore entertain new ideas, and form new opinions. . . .

J. HECTOR ST. JOHN DE
CREVECOEUR,

Letters from an American Farmer, 1782

AS IMMIGRANTS TO A NEW LAND, THE COLONISTS brought the cultural and political heritage of Europe with them. The morals, values, and traditions of England had evolved over many centuries. While the colonists' ties to the Old World remained strong, their location in the colonies provided them with an opportunity to develop morals, values, and traditions of their own. It is from this base that American culture—and American government—developed.

The political heritage of England played an important role in the way the colonial government—and ultimately the national government of the new nation—developed. The Magna Carta—the English Bill of Rights—had guaranteed rights and liberties to English nobility since the thirteenth century. This tradition of individual

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freedom would continue in the new nation and would become a dominant theme in the lives of the American people.

European culture shaped colonial society. The first colonists sought to recreate proper English society in the New World. Although the harsh environment they encountered did not permit them to transplant English culture completely, many of their attitudes and beliefs remained strong. These attitudes and beliefs contributed to the development of American society and the role of individuals within it.

Many of the leaders of the American revolution were philosophers. The greatest philosophical influence on them was the Enlightenment, an intellectual movement that swept through England and France in the eighteenth century. Enlightenment philosophy was considered radical in its day. It claimed that people are born with the reason and common sense to rule themselves. The only true political philosophy is democracy because it is the only system that respects the dignity of the individual. The Declaration of Independence was the embodiment of Enlightenment philosophy: "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their creator with certain unalienable rights. . . . That to secure these rights, governments are instituted among men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed." These statements became the basis for the founding of America.

The location of the colonies was a key element in the development of American culture. Although Europe heavily influenced the colonists, the great distance that separated the Old World from the New World provided the colonists with a unique opportunity. The relative isolation of the English colonies in America gave the colonists the freedom to challenge the rigid class structure of Europe, the right of a nonrepresentative government to rule them, and the traditional beliefs about human nature.

The birth of the United States is unique. It was the first nation to be born amid the flash and fire of revolution. The generation of people who fought that revolution had strong ideas about the need for opportunity, individual rights, equality, and self-government. These ideas were an inspiration to the people of Williamsburg. Their commitment to these ideas—and their willingness to fight for them—is the lesson we learn from Williamsburg today.

The Desire for Opportunity

The United States has long been called the “land of opportunity.” For those who want to improve the quality of their life, America provides them with the chance to do so. It is a primary reason why settlers came here three centuries ago. And it is a primary reason why people come to our country today.

In the eighteenth century, the New World was viewed as a vast, untapped well of natural resources. Land was plentiful, and the soil could sustain a variety of crops. But the richness of the land presented other possibilities as well. Fishing, hunting and trapping, and lumbering were all profitable enterprises. The land provided unlimited opportunities for the immigrants to the New World.

While such opportunities were very attractive to many Europeans, the journey to the New World was expensive. To attract more settlers and establish a work force, wealthy colonists began importing *indentured servants*. By signing a contract, a man or woman agreed to work for the sponsoring colonist for five to seven years in return for free passage. Once the contract was completed, indentured servants were usually given land—in some cases up to fifty acres each—to do with as they pleased. This system encouraged many people to leave their homes for the colonies.



The growing economy of the New World also provided social mobility. The strict feudal class structure prevalent in Europe made it difficult for people to move up through the ranks of society. A similar class structure existed in the colonies—there were the rich and the poor and a developing merchant, or middle, class. But the opportunity to move up the social and economic ladder was far greater in the colonies than in Europe. A peasant could leave Europe and in a few years be a landowner in the colonies, reaping the benefits that land and money bring.

But as the population of the colonies increased, the need for land increased as well. At first, the white settlers bought or traded land from the Native Americans. Later, they began taking it by force. The desire for land—and the opportunities it provided—became a national obsession. It created centuries of tension between the white people and the Native Americans. It eventually led to the near destruction of an entire race of people.

Opportunity was at the heart of immigration to the New World. Through the eyes of a new settler, the wilderness of America meant a home, a farm, a town. The land provided unlimited opportunities for individuals and for society. Today, as a nation we still believe that everyone has the opportunity to better his or her life in America. But do we understand the price of unlimited opportunity? For example, can we provide unlimited opportunities to one group of people without denying these same opportunities to others? Do we have a respect for the land—once considered the “great provider” of opportunity—and the resources it provides? Is it possible to balance our desire for unlimited opportunity with our need to preserve the land?

Connections

1.

From the beginning, Europeans looked to the New World as the land of opportunity. What do you think were the opportunities available in the eighteenth century to someone your age in England? What opportunities were available to someone your age in Williamsburg? How do these compare?

2.

Are there limits to the opportunities that one nation can provide? For example, what opportunities do you feel are available to you today? Do you feel there are limits to what you can achieve? Do you think that America offers as many opportunities today as it did in the past? Why or why not?

3.

Eighteenth-century Williamsburg could be considered a "town of opportunity." Would you say that the opportunities in Williamsburg were unlimited? Why or why not?

The Rights of Individuals

The rights of individuals are written into the Constitution as the Bill of Rights. Freedom of speech, freedom of religion, freedom of the press, and the right to trial by jury have become so much a part of the fabric of our national character that we might forget that men

and women were once willing to lay down their lives to protect these rights for themselves and future generations. These rights—first secured by the English in the thirteenth century—have a long tradition in our history.

Englishmen were granted individual rights by King John when he signed the Magna Carta in 1215. With the signing of this document, English noblemen were declared free and were given certain liberties. Among these were the right to due process and the right to a representative government. These rights were the basis for British government and law.

The Magna Carta was open to interpretation, however, and not every king enforced it in the same way. By the seventeenth century, with religious and political revolt spreading throughout England, basic freedoms and rights once thought to be guaranteed were being denied. Religious persecution and political purges forced many people to seek refuge elsewhere. Their travels led many of them to the New World.

For many years, the colonists lived free from the turmoils of Europe. The British government, preoccupied with wars it was fighting in Europe, allowed the colonies to grow and develop with only minor supervision. In addition, the great distance between the colonies and England protected the colonists from government intervention.

Because of this relative isolation, individual rights flourished in the colonies. Several colonies were founded on the principle of religious freedom. The press enjoyed more freedom of expression in America than in Europe. Papers and pamphlets extolling a variety of opinions on many topics appeared throughout the colonies.

This all changed in the mid-eighteenth century. In 1763, the British defeated the French in the French and Indian War and forced the French out of much of North America. But the war had

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been costly. The English government, feeling that the war was fought to protect colonial lives, began to tax the colonies to help pay for the war. When the colonists refused to pay these taxes, the British government—in an effort to force the colonists into submission—began to suppress individual rights. The colonists viewed these actions as intrusions on freedoms they felt were guaranteed by law. The cry for revolution was heard across the colonies. The House of Burgesses in Virginia stood at the forefront of the revolt.

Meeting at the capitol in Williamsburg, Virginia took a decisive step on the road to revolution. Virginia legislators unanimously voted to declare their independence from the British Empire. George Mason, a wealthy Virginia planter, was given the task of writing a constitution and a bill of rights for the new Commonwealth of Virginia. On June 12, 1776, the Virginia Declaration of Rights was adopted unanimously, and, on June 29, with the passage of Mason's constitution, Virginia became one of the first free and independent states in North America.



The Virginia Declaration of Rights, with only minor alterations, became the Bill of Rights of the United States. The sixteen articles of the Virginia Declaration of Rights included such fundamental principles as the right to free elections, freedom of the press, freedom of religion, freedom of speech, and the right to trial by jury. These rights remain a cornerstone of our nation today.

The founding fathers viewed the rights of individuals as sacred. No government or king could deny these rights to their citizens. The rights of individuals were above the law. Yet, since that time, our views of these rights have changed. The government has found it necessary to place limits on some of these rights. For example, the government has restricted freedom of speech and freedom of the press in times of war or to protect sensitive negotiations. Under these circumstances, do you think the government has the right to deny freedoms granted by the Constitution? Do you think the government has the right to deny freedoms granted by the Constitution to particular individuals or groups that it views as dangerous? How do we decide who is dangerous? Should there be limits on how much freedom a person has?

Connections

1.

The separation of church and state grew out of the colonists' revolt against the state-sponsored Church of England. By living in England—or any of its colonies—one automatically became a member of the church and had to pay taxes to support it. The colonists felt that individuals had the right to decide for themselves what form their worship would take and which church they would support. When the new nation was created, the colonists vowed that church and state would be separated. Do you think that the lines between church and state are still distinct? Do issues such as prayer in schools, tax deductions for tuition paid to private schools, and tax exemptions for churches violate the separation of church and state?

2.

Recently the government placed restrictions on the freedom of the press. For example, during the 1983 invasion of Grenada, the Pentagon prevented the press from filming troop activities until most of the fighting was over. Was the government justified in restricting the press during this time? How do you think our nation's founders would have reacted to these restrictions?

3.

Colonial armies were made up of citizens who had to supply their own guns. The right to own a gun was viewed as essential to the protection of the new nation. Do you think the well-being of the nation still depends on the right to bear arms? Has our view of this freedom changed?

The Concept of Equality

All men are created equal. To many of us, this is a basic American belief. When Thomas Jefferson inserted those five words into the Declaration of Independence, he perhaps had no idea he was creating what would become one of the most controversial issues of American society. The founding fathers dared to consider the equality of men as a fundamental truth. Yet their view of equality—and of men—was different from the views we hold today.

The culture of eighteenth century Europe shaped the colonial view of society. When Jefferson wrote that all men are created equal, he was making this statement based on the prevailing view that "men" meant white male landowners over 21 years of age. The right to vote was limited to these individuals, and this group held political and social power over the rest of society.

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Women were seen as wives and bearers of children. They were denied voting privileges and, in some communities, even the right to an education. A woman's social and economic status was based solely on her father's—and later her husband's—role in society. Her only hope for upward mobility was through marriage, but even here she was expected to marry within her own class. Only unmarried women enjoyed some of the rights of men; for example, they could own property and run businesses. But once a woman married, she lost these rights and became subservient to her husband.



The keeping of slaves was seen by our nation's founders as a necessary part of the colonial economy. Without slave labor, huge plantation farms could not be worked. Both male and female slaves were viewed more as property than as human beings. They were denied the most basic of rights, and their status as slaves passed from generation to generation. Although some slaves were freed by their owners, most lived under the strict control of white men.

Jefferson and his fellow revolutionaries did not create total equality in America—nor was that their intention. What they did create was an opportunity for the nation to discuss and debate the concept of equality.

Over the years, equality has been extended to embrace many groups and issues. It has been redefined and reexamined by every generation since the revolution. By stating “all men are created equal,” Jefferson opened the door to what was to become one of the most controversial issues of our nation.

Connections

1.

On July 25, 1776, the Declaration of Independence was read aloud on the steps of the courthouse in Williamsburg. It was met with cheers of approval. What would have been your reaction to hearing the words "all men are created equal" if you had been:

- a white male land owner
- a slave
- the wife of the Royal Governor

2.

Over the years, people have wondered what Thomas Jefferson meant by "all men are created equal." In the nineteenth century, some people thought Jefferson meant racial equality, and a bloody civil war was fought over this interpretation. In the early 1900s, many thought that Jefferson was speaking to the equality of the sexes, and women fought to gain the right to vote. What do you think Jefferson meant by "all men are created equal"? Do you agree or disagree with this view?

3.

Today, discussions about equality center on economic issues. Women and minorities seek equal pay and equal opportunity for employment in the job market. What do you think equality means today? Has your interpretation of "all men are created equal" been met in the United States? If so, how? If not, what steps need to be taken to make it so?

4.

How would American history be different if Jefferson had not included the words "all men are created equal" in the Declaration of Independence?

The Right to Self-Government

The founding fathers felt that, if their new nation was to survive, it needed a government that would protect the rights to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. According to our nation's founders, the only true government was one that derived its power from the people. They reasoned that if people have the right to determine their form of government, they will choose one that will guarantee them these rights. The right of citizens to institute a government that truly represents their needs and desires is at the heart of the American revolution.

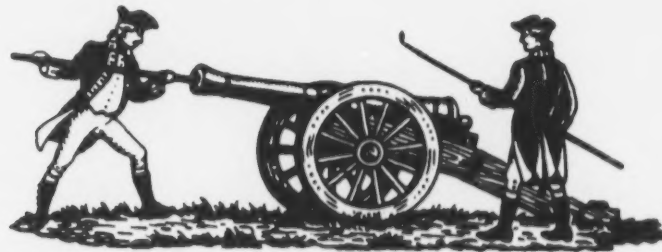
With the signing of the Magna Carta, the English gained the right to representative government. The kings of England extended this tradition to the colonies. Since the first meeting of the House of Burgesses in Jamestown in 1619, representative government was considered an essential part of political life in the colonies. But as time passed, the relationship between the colonial legislatures and the British Parliament changed.

The colonial legislatures increasingly viewed themselves as governing bodies separate from the king and his Parliament. They respected the power and traditions of the king, but felt themselves more capable of handling the internal affairs of the colonies. Parliament had little idea of how to deal with Native American relations, disputed land claims, or the need for roads. The colonists, familiar with these problems, believed they were in a better position to handle their own affairs.

On the other hand, the British government saw the colonists as subjects of the British Empire. As such, the colonists and the colonial legislatures were subordinate to Parliament. The king and

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his Parliament believed *they* had the right to control the affairs of the colonies. The king felt that the colonists were represented in Parliament by virtue of their English citizenship. The question of who best represents the interests of the colonies—Parliament or the colonial legislatures—would be a major cause of the coming revolution.



After the French and Indian War, the British Parliament suddenly increased taxes on the colonies. Parliament saw this as an extension of their power over the colonies. However, the colonists saw it as an infringement of their right to self-government. They rose up in defiance. Colonists increased their demands for “no taxation without representation” and spoke out strongly against the king and Parliament. At the center of this growing revolutionary fervor stood Williamsburg.

In 1765, in the Virginia House of Burgesses, Patrick Henry vehemently denounced the policies of the British Empire. He called for the passage of resolutions against the king that would serve as a formal protest. He concluded his speech with the line: “Caesar had his Brutus, Charles the First his Cromwell, and George the Third—may he profit from their example.”

Such words were considered treason at the time, yet Henry and the colonists continued to fight for the right to rule themselves. Boycotts of British goods and attacks against British authority

forced Parliament to tighten their control over the colonies. Tensions rose to the point where martial law was declared in some colonies, and the king outlawed most of the colonial governments.

Undaunted, the colonial legislatures met in secret. Committees of correspondence were established to maintain contact between the colonies. Books and pamphlets that denounced the king and his oppressive laws were published. In this way, the colonies continued to govern themselves without the approval of the British government.

Our nation's founders sought to establish a government that was "of the people, by the people, and for the people." They felt it was their right to abolish any government—even the British crown—if it did not meet the needs of the people. They sought to guarantee that the rights of the people would always be protected.

Connections

1.

In the Declaration of Independence, Thomas Jefferson stated his belief that citizens have the right to abolish a government when it no longer meets their needs. When the new government of the United States was established, the writers of the Constitution sought to create a system in which citizens could peacefully change their government as their needs changed. What tools did they give us to do this? How does the Constitution protect your right to participate in government?

THE VISION OF WILLIAMSBURG

2.

One of the ways in which we participate in government today is through the electoral process. Considering that half of the voting population does not vote in national elections, do you think Americans today believe as strongly in the right to self-government as did the colonists?

3.

Another tool for changing our government is the constitutional convention. Since the founding of this country two hundred years ago, there has been no major change in the structure of American government. On the two-hundredth anniversary of the Constitution—the “blueprint” of our system of government—do you think it is time to reexamine this system? If so, what changes would you recommend?

EPILOGUE:
*The Lesson of
Williamsburg*

If we carefully examine the political state of America, after having studied its history, we shall be convinced that not an opinion, a custom, a law, or even an event, is upon record which the origin of the people will not explain.

ALEXIS DE TOCQUEVILLE,
Democracy in America, 1835

BY THE SPRING OF 1776, COMPLETE SEPARATION BETWEEN the colonies and England was inevitable. Formal relations were strained to the breaking point. The men and women of Williamsburg played a pivotal role in the growing revolutionary fervor then sweeping the colonies. The debate of revolutionary ideas kept the taverns of Williamsburg open late into the night. With tension mounting, delegates to Virginia's House of Burgesses met to consider their next course of action.

On May 15, 1776, the House of Burgesses declared Virginia free of British authority. Virginia called upon the representatives of the Continental Congress, then assembling in Philadelphia, to do the same. Virginia's representative Richard Henry Lee proposed to the Congress a resolution for independence, and the thirty-three-year-

old Thomas Jefferson was asked to put into words the principles of the new nation. On July 4, 1776, the Continental Congress signed Jefferson's document—the Declaration of Independence. With this document, a nation was born.

The Signing of the Declaration of Independence

There is, perhaps, no other document in American history that is as important as the Declaration of Independence. It was, first and foremost, an announcement to the world of the birth of the United States—a new nation different from any other. The Declaration stated that this country would be based on principles such as opportunity, freedom, and equality and that these principles would be protected by a freely elected government.

But the Declaration of Independence was more. It was a pledge, made by its signers and all who believed in what it said, that they were willing to support the new nation with their "lives, fortunes, and honor." These men—and thousands of other colonial men and women—were willing to sacrifice everything for the dream of freedom.

The Declaration of Independence was also a declaration of war. The colonists were willing to engage in armed conflict with a powerful enemy to obtain the rights and liberties outlined in Jefferson's document. It was a call to arms throughout the thirteen colonies.

*A part of the Declaration of Independence.
In the lower left corner, beginning with George
Wythe, you can read the names of the
seven signers from Virginia*

ing, as before in their former, as to more
 ed for light and transient causes; and accordingly, all exposure hath shown, that mankind are more disposed to suffer, while
 us to which they are accustomed. But when along train of abuses and usurpations, pursuing invariably the same Object,
 their right, it is their duty, to throw off such Government, and to provide new guards for their future security. — Such has
 necessity, which constrains them to alter their former Systems of Government. The history of the present King of Great
 in direct object the establishment of an absolute Tyranny over these States. To prove this let Facts be submitted to a candid
 the most wholesome and necessary for the public good. — He has prohibited his Governors to pass Laws of immediate
 his Spent, should be obtained, and when so suspended, he has utterly neglected to attend to them. — He has refused to
 these people would relinquish the right of Representation in the Legislature, a right inestimable to them and pernicious
 at places unusual, uncomfortable, and distant from the depository of their public Records, for the sole purpose of fatiguing them into
 sive Houses especially for opposing with manly firmness his invasions on the rights of the people. — He has refused for
 the Legislative powers, incapable of Annihilation have returned to the People at large for their exercise, the State remains
 without and contrivances within. — He has endeavored to prevent the Population of these States, for that purpose, to stirre
 to encourage their migrations hither, and raising the conditions of new Appropriations of Lands. — He has obstructed the
 any judicious measures. — He has made judges dependent on his Will alone for the tenure of their offices, and the amount
 of. New Officers and sent hither swarms of Officers to harass our people and eat out their substance. — He has kept among
 Legislatures. — He has applied to under the Military, independent of and superior to the Civil power. — He has combined
 and unacknowledged on our laws giving his Spent to these Acts of pretended Legislation. — For Quarters large bodies of
 from Parliament for any Murders which they should commit on the Inhabitants of these States. — For cutting off
 us without our Consent. — For depriving us in many cases of the benefits of Trial by Jury. — For Transporting us beyond
 System of English Laws in a neighboring Province, establishing therein an Arbitrary government, and enlarging its Boundaries
 being the same absolute rule into these Colonies. — For taking away our Charters, abolishing our most valuable Laws and
 suspending our own Legislatures, and declaring themselves invested with power to legislate for us in all cases whatsoever. —
 dictate and wage War against us. — He has plundered our seas, ravaged our Coasts, burnt our towns, and destroyed the lives
 foreign Mercenaries to complete the works of death, desolation and tyranny, already begun with circumstances of cruelty & perfidy
 the Head of a cruel and tyrannical nation. — He has constrained our fellow Citizens taken captive on the high seas to bear Arms against
 to fall themselves by their Hands. — He has excited domestic insurrections amongst us, and has endeavored to bring on the
 rule of warfare is an undistinguished destruction of all ages, sexes and conditions. In every stage of these Oppressions We
 Nations have ever unweariedly opposed ^{our} united energy. At present, whose character is thus marked by every act which may define a Tyrant,
 in attention to our British brethren. We have warned them from time to time of attempts by their Legislatures to extend an unwarant
 as of our emigration and settlement here. We have appealed to their native justice and magnanimity, and we have compared them
 rich, would inevitably intrust our connections and correspondence. They too have been deaf to the voice of justice and of
 high denounces our Separation, and hold them as we hold the rest of mankind. Enemies in War, in Peace Friends.
 States of America in general Congress, Assembled appealing to the Supreme Judge of the world for the redress of our in-
 colonies jointly publish and declare, That these United Colonies are, and of Right ought to be Free and Independent
 Town, and that all political connection between them and the State of Great Britain, is and ought to be totally dissolved, and
 by War, conclude Peace, contract Alliances, establish Commerce, and to do all other Acts and Things which Independent
 Declaration, with a firm reliance on the protection of Divine Providence, we mutually pledge to each other our Lives, our Fortunes

<i>John Hancock</i>	<i>John Morris</i>	<i>John Jay</i>	<i>Joshua Bartlett</i>
<i>Samuel Adams</i>	<i>Benjamin Rush</i>	<i>Paul Livingston</i>	<i>Wm. Whipple</i>
<i>Wm. Paine</i>	<i>Benjamin Franklin</i>	<i>Samuel Lewis</i>	<i>Sam. Adams</i>
<i>Thos. Paine</i>	<i>John Morton</i>	<i>Lewis Morris</i>	<i>John Adams</i>
<i>Charles Carroll of Carrollton</i>	<i>Geo. Clymer</i>		<i>Robt. Frazer Paine</i>
	<i>Sam. Smith</i>		<i>Abridge Gerry</i>
	<i>Geo. Taylor</i>		<i>Step. Hopkins</i>
	<i>James Wilson</i>	<i>Rich. Stockton</i>	<i>William Ellery</i>
	<i>John R. Ross</i>	<i>Geo. Washington</i>	<i>Roger Sherman</i>
	<i>Caspar Sidney</i>	<i>Sam. Hopkinson</i>	<i>Sam. Huntington</i>
	<i>Geo. Ross</i>	<i>John Ross</i>	<i>Wm. Williams</i>
	<i>Thos. Mifflin</i>	<i>Mrs. Clark</i>	<i>Oliver Wolcott</i>
			<i>Matthew Thornton</i>
<i>George Wythe</i>			
<i>Richard Henry Lee</i>			
<i>Thos. Jefferson</i>			
<i>Wm. Harrison</i>			
<i>Thos. Nelson Jr</i>			
<i>James Lightfoot Lee</i>			
<i>Charles Braxton</i>			

The American Revolution

By declaring its independence, the United States ended its colonial relations with England. The war that followed was fought to secure the rights and the freedoms that England had denied to the colonists.

Williamsburg remained the wartime capital of the newly created Commonwealth of Virginia until 1780. Patrick Henry served as the first governor of Virginia. The city was also the headquarters for General George Washington during the decisive battle of the war at nearby Yorktown. It was here that, after seven years of fighting, colonial forces defeated the British army for the last time. With their surrender, England had to recognize the United States as a free and independent nation. Having won their independence, America's founders were now faced with the task of establishing a government for the new nation.

Establishing a Government for the New Nation

At first, the United States was ruled by a system of government established by the Articles of Confederation in 1781. The nation's founders, fearful of centralized authority in the form of a king or congress, granted each of the new thirteen states the power to establish their own rules and regulations within their borders. A weak national government could do nothing more than make recommendations to each state. After six years, the need for a stronger federal government was apparent. Representatives met in Philadelphia to amend what was known to some as the "Articles of Confusion."

The result of the Philadelphia meetings of 1787 was not a reworking of the Articles of Confederation but the creation of an entirely new document, the Constitution. Within the system of government created by the Constitution, opportunity could flourish, individual rights could be maintained, equality could expand to embrace new groups and new interpretations, and the right of citizens to participate in their government could be extended to include blacks, women, and young people. The Constitution put into practice a government that would keep the ideas of the founding fathers alive.

The Lesson of Williamsburg

After the Revolution, the role of Williamsburg as a leading player in the birth of our nation was over. The seeds of the nation planted in Williamsburg in the decade before took root here and grew. The men and women of Williamsburg spread these ideas and dreams to the other colonies—and eventually—to the world. The realization of their vision came with the ratification of the Constitution in 1789.

During the war, the capital of Virginia was moved to Richmond, a more easily defensible location. After the war, Williamsburg “retired.” It went from being the most important city of a major



colonial power to a small, sleepy village. But its importance today cannot be overlooked.

Today, Williamsburg is a living laboratory in which we can study democracy and its people as did Alexis de Tocqueville. Though the laws have changed, the issues have become more complex, and the debates have intensified, what we find in Williamsburg—and the lesson we learn here—is very similar to what de Tocqueville discovered 150 years ago. The people—and their belief in the ideas and principles of Jefferson and the other founding fathers—make this nation dynamic and unique. The men and women of Williamsburg had the courage and the desire to fight to incorporate their ideas and dreams into a nation. The same spirit that moved them two hundred years ago continues to move Americans today. It is the challenge and the test of every generation to keep the spirit of Williamsburg alive and to continue the dream they began so long ago.

Connections

1.

Some of the men and women who lived in Williamsburg plotted the overthrow of what they saw as a repressive government. Even by today's standards, such action would be considered radical and dangerous. Yet, many of the revolutionaries felt the time had come for serious measures. Would you have been willing to risk everything you had to achieve the goals of the American Revolution? What would it take for you to become a revolutionary today?

EPILOGUE: THE LESSON OF WILLIAMSBURG

2.

Many of the discussions about the revolution took place in the taverns of Williamsburg after sessions of the House of Burgesses. If you were in Williamsburg in 1775 and overheard one of these conversations, what would you have done? Would you have reported the participants to the British authorities—as some people did—or would you have joined in the discussion?

3.

The Declaration of Independence established standards not only for the United States but for the rest of the world. Thirteen years after the American Revolution, French revolutionaries embraced Jefferson's words in the French Declaration of the Rights of Man. In 1821, the constitution of Greece declared that government derives its power from the people and that freedom of speech and the equality of men were above the law. In the nineteenth century, nearly every nation of Latin America issued a declaration of independence based on the American model. And in 1945, Ho Chi Minh declared that "all men are created equal" in the opening sentence of the Declaration of Independence of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam. Why do you think so many nations—even communist nations—have used the Declaration of Independence as a model? What is it about the Declaration of Independence that makes it so universally accepted?

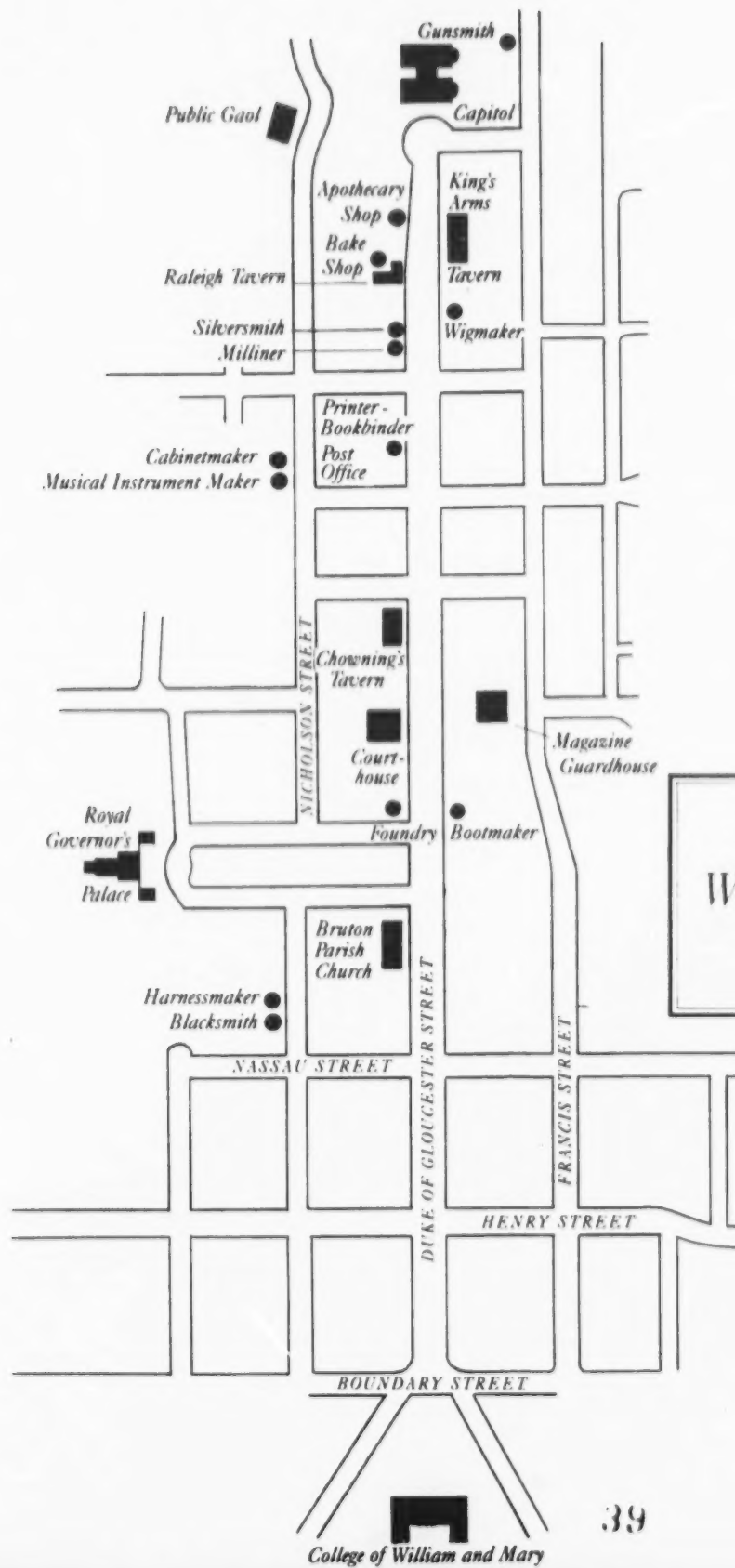
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